

## Message Text

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P 022025Z SEP 76  
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4614

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FOR THE SECRETARY

E.O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: PINT PFOR FR  
SUBJECT: FRENCH POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. SUMMARY: ON THE EVE OF YOUR FORTHCOMING MEETING WITH GISCARD, AND AT A TURNING POINT IN HIS PRESIDENCY, I WANT TO GIVE YOU MY ASSESSMENT OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS AND PROSPECTS BEFORE US ON THE FRENCH INTERNAL POLITICAL SCENE. END SUMMARY.

2. RIVAL CHARISMAS: AS AN OBSERVER OF BOTH MEN YOU WILL HAVE NOTED THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE PERSONALITIES OF PRESIDENT GISCARD AND JACQUES CHIRAC, THE EX-PRIME MINISTER. THERE WAS AN INCOMPATIBILITY OF TWO RIVAL CHARISMAS: THAT OF COMBATIVE, CONSERVATIVE CHIRAC, CALLED BY POMPIDOU "MY BULLDOZER," AND THAT OF THE COOL, ARISTOCRATIC, CAMELOT-LEANING GISCARD. THERE WAS ALSO A BASIC CONFLICT BETWEEN THE IDEAS AND POLICIES THEY FAVORED. SINCE THE FIFTH REPUBLIC'S CONSTITUTION GIVES PREPONDERANT POWER TO THE PRESIDENT, THE RECENT FALL OF THE CHIRAC GOVERNMENT WAS INEVITABLE, AND IN THE PATTERN OF FIFTH REPUBLIC PRECEDENTS.

3. THE RIVALRY OF IDEAS: GISCARD IS BASICALLY REFORM ORIENTED. HE SEEKS TO BRING ABOUT AN "ADVANCED LIBERAL SOCIETY," WHICH WILL SUBSTANTIALLY MODERNIZE FRANCE'S SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC STRUCTURE, STILL SURPRISINGLY EDWARDIAN, TO MATCH THE REMARKABLE AND

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DYNAMIC GROWTH OF THE FRENCH INDUSTRIAL ECONOMY OVER

THE LAST 25 YEARS. CHIRAC, ON THE OTHER HAND, DEEPLY BELIEVES THAT FRANCE IS A BASICALLY CONSERVATIVE COUNTRY AND THAT A STRONG NATIONALIST POLICY, ALONG DE GAULLE'S MODEL, WILL CONTINUE TO RALLY ENOUGH WORKER, PEASANT, AND PETIT BOURGEOIS VOTERS TO BRING ANOTHER VICTORY FOR THE GOVERNMENT COALITION IN THE 1978 LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS. (HE WAS SUFFICIENTLY NERVOUS ABOUT THE STEADY GROWTH OF THE LEFT, HOWEVER, TO WISH TO ADVANCE THOSE ELECTIONS BY 18 MONTHS FROM THEIR PRESENT 1978 SCHEDULE.) GISCARD IS CONFIDENT THAT HIS REFORMS AND HIS ADVANCED LIBERAL SOCIETY WILL BRING ABOUT DEFECTIONS FROM THE LEFT OPPOSITION AND WILL CREATE A SOLID PRESIDENTIAL MAJORITY PARTY TO REPLACE THE UNEASY ALLIANCE OF GAULLISTS, WITH CENTRISTS AND HIS OWN INDEPENDENT REPUBLICANS. WHEN CHIRAC CHALLENGED THIS PHILOSOPHY AND DEMANDED PART OF HIS POWERS, GISCARD PREFERRED TO ACCEPT HIS RESIGNATION.

4. THE SPECTER AT THE WINDOW: AS YOU KNOW, MITTERRAND AND HIS COMMUNIST AND LEFT RADICAL ALLIES REMAIN THE LOOMING THREAT FOR 1978. EVEN THE PRESIDENCY OF GISCARD, SCHEDULED CONSTITUTIONALLY TO RUN UNTIL 1981 MIGHT NOT SURVIVE A LEFT VICTORY. MITTERRAND IS CONFIDENT OF SUCCESS IN THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS, AND HIS JUNIOR PARTNER-ALLY, THE PCF, IS BEHAVING ITSELF SURPRISINGLY WELL, SUSTAINED BY THE HEADY PROSPECT OF POWER. THE LATENT, SERIOUS CONTRADICTIONS WHICH EXIST BETWEEN SOCIALISTS AND COMMUNISTS GENERALLY REMAIN BETTER REPRESSED THAN THOSE BETWEEN THE PARTIES OF THE GOVERNING MAJORITY.

5. VALERY'S BET: GISCARD HAS BEEN COMPELLED BY CHIRAC'S BRINGING THE CONFLICT TO A HEAD TO PLACE HIS BET UNMISTAKABLY ON HIS REFORMIST PHILOSOPHY. THE NEW BARRE GOVERNMENT, IF IT SUCCEEDS IN MASTERING INFLATION, NOW AGAIN RUNNING BETWEEN 10 AND 12 PERCENT, AND IN STRENGTHENING THE STILL WOBBLY FRENCH RECOVERY FROM RECESSION, MAY WIN ENOUGH PUBLIC SUPPORT TO CARRY THE LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS. IT IS LESS LIKELY, BUT

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STILL POSSIBLE, THAT GISCARDIAN REFORMS -- HIS "CHARTER" FOR THE ADVANCED LIBERAL SOCIETY WILL MAKE ITS APPEARANCE ON SEPTEMBER 20, AND AS ITS CHIEF AUTHOR HE WILL BE GRATIFIED BY ANY INTEREST IN IT YOU SHOW -- WILL WIN A FEW SUPPORTERS FROM THE MORE MODERATE PARTS OF THE OPPOSITION PARTIES. IF THE BARRE GOVERNMENT EITHER FAILS TO ATTAIN ITS OBJECTIVES,

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OR DOES NOT RECEIVE VOTER CREDIT IN ATTAINING THEM, GISCARD IS CLEARLY EXPOSED. HE IS NOW AS HE HAS LONG WANTED TO BE THE IMMEDIATE AND VISIBLE LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT. HE CAN HARDLY CLAIM HEREAFTER TO BE A PRESIDENTIAL MONARCH ABOVE THE FRAY.

6. CROSSING THE DESERT: CHIRAC IS GONE BUT WILL NOT BE FORGOTTEN. HE WILL CONCENTRATE ON RALLYING TO HIS FOLLOWING IN THE UDR PARTY AS MANY OF ITS MEMBERS AS POSSIBLE. THOUGH MANY OF ITS LEADERS, THE "BARONS," HATE HIM MORE THAN GISCARD, HE WILL REMAIN A VIABLE AND MUCH YOUNGER "BARON." HE WILL NOT OPPOSE THE PARTY'S SUPPORT OF THE NEW GOVERNMENT BUT WAIT IT OUT AS HEIR PRESUMPTIVE TO THE COLLAPSE OF GISCARD'S PLANS. DE GAULLE ONCE TERMED HIS TIME OUT OF OFFICE BETWEEN 1946 AND 1958 "CROSSING THE DESERT." CHIRAC HAS YOUTH, ENDURANCE AND FORMIDABLE CHARISMA, AS WELL AS A RAGING THIRST FOR THE PRESIDENCY, TO SUSTAIN HIM ON HIS OWN SAFARI.

7. MEANWHILE MITTERRAND: DURING THE NEXT 18 MONTHS MITTERRAND WILL CONTINUE TO FOLLOW THE WINNING WAYS THAT HAVE REUNITED THE SOCIALISTS AND ADVANCED THEIR FORTUNES WELL AHEAD OF HIS COMMUNIST ALLIES. (THEIR VOTE RATIO IS PROBABLY NOW 30 PERCENT VERSUS 20 PERCENT OF THE ELECTORATE.) HE MAY EVEN BE STRONGER IF HE DOES NOT GET TOO FAR AHEAD OF HIS ALLIES. TOO WIDE

A GAP MIGHT CAUSE MARCHAIS' PCF TO ABANDON THE AL-  
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LIANCE AS TOO DAMAGING TO THE PCF. MITTERRAND HAS  
STRONG INCENTIVES TO FOLLOW A LINE CRITICAL OF THE US  
AND OF ATLANTICISM, BUT HE WILL PROBABLY STILL  
PRIVATELY ASSURE US OF HIS FIDELITY TO BOTH. HE NOW  
HAS THE PROSPECT OF ATTRACTING ANY STRAY GAULLISTS WHO  
DESERT THE NEW GISCARDIZED GOVERNMENT. A SIZEABLE  
MINORITY IN HIS OWN SOCIALIST PARTY IS ATTRACTED TO  
GAULLIST NATIONALIST FORMULAS, WHILE THE PCF ALSO  
LOVES THEM DEARLY.

8. IT IS CLEAR THAT OUR NATIONAL INTERESTS CONTINUE  
TO BE BEST SERVED BY A SUCCESS FOR GISCARD. WHILE WE  
WANT TO STAY IN TOUCH WITH CHIRAC, AS THE MOST  
CHARISMATIC OF THE GAULLIST LEADERS NOT IN OFFICE,  
HE IS A LIKELY PROSPECT FOR THE NEAR TERM. WE  
SHOULD CONTINUE STEADILY AND WITHOUT OSTENTATION TO  
MAINTAIN OUR KNOWN POSITION WITH RESPECT TO ANY  
GOVERNMENT OF THE UNION OF THE LEFT, WHILE THE PCF  
REMAINS PART OF IT, WHILE MAINTAINING CONTACT WITH  
THE SOCIALISTS. IF IT SHOULD COME TO POWER NEVERTHE-  
LESS, WE SHOULD THEN, LIKE GISCARD IN THAT CIRCUM-  
STANCE, HOPE FOR A SOCIALIST-COMMUNIST SPLIT AND A  
CENTER-LEFT COMBINATION.

9. IN THE COMING 18 MONTHS WE WILL BE WATCHING  
DEVELOPMENTS INSIDE THIS FRAMEWORK AND I WILL FROM  
TIME-TO-TIME PASS ON TO YOU MY OBSERVATIONS ON THEM.  
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